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SUBJECT: WEEKLY NEPAL MEDIA REPORT FROM 16 TO 22 MARCH 2004

STATE FOR NP, AC, PM

STATE FOR IN/R/MR

STATE FOR SA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO

STATE FOR SA/PPD

WEEKLY MEDIA REPORT (March 16 to 22, 2004)

1. MAOIST INSURGENCY

-- Massive attack in Myagdi district headquarters: Maoist rebels launched a huge attack in Beni, Myagdi district headquarters on Saturday night. The Maoists took the District Police Office (DPO), Chief District Officer and 39 security personnel. The Maoists completely destroyed all administrative buildings including the District Administration Office (DAO), District Development Committee (DDC), District Jail and District Court". The Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) said it believes about 500 Maoists were killed and over 200 others injured in the exchange of fire. The army spokesperson said that various weapons and explosives including AK 47 rifle, were recovered from the clash site". The Maoists, however, said they killed about 150 security personnel in the clash. (Major reports, 3/22)

-- Maoist radio station destroyed: Security forces have ruined the Seti Mahakali Peoples FM Radio that was brought into operation by the Maoists a month ago. (Centrist "Nepal Samacharpatra, E/D, 3/21)

-- Scheme to kick-start in 3 Maoist-hit districts: The government has selected three Maoist-hit Dang, Kailali and Bardiya districts to implement its ambitious land redistribution program and has initiated preparatory work. (Centrist "The Kathmandu Post," E/D, 3/20)

-- Harassed journalists take refuge in Kathmandu: In a disturbing fallout of Nepal's insurgency, at least 25 journalists have been displaced from their places of work and residence over the past six months by both the Maoists and the security forces, reported OneWorld. (Pro-India "The Himalayan Times," E/D, 3/21)

-- Record number of disappearances in Nepal: Amnesty: Since the breakdown of ceasefire in August, a record number of persons have been "disappeared" by the Maoists as well as the security forces, according to Charan Kumar Prasai, former president of Amnesty International - Nepal. (Centrist "Kantipur," V/D, 3/21)

-- Maoists ready for UN mediation: Maoist chairman Prachanda has said his party is ready to hold talks with the government under United Nations mediation. "We can hold dialogue with the government with UN mediation, even in the middle of the ongoing "People's War," to respect the appeals made by various human rights and civil society organizations," Prachanda said in an appeal released last night. (Media reports, 3/18)

-- Aid bodies threaten to pull out: The United Nations (UN) and other foreign aid agencies have threatened to pull out of the troubled country because their ongoing development programs will be at risk as Maoists are trying to extort money from their staff. "Our project offices have been receiving letters from the underground rebels demanding monetary assistance and that's the reason why the UN is forced to issue a public statement today, a UN official said. Besides UN, the other aid agencies including the Department for International Development (DFID), Technical Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Germany (GTZ) and Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) published a separate joint statement in newspapers Wednesday stating that their development programs and staff are increasingly being put under pressure by the Maoists to provide forced donations. " However, the agencies have resisted paying the rebels because it is against their policy. (Media reports, 3/18)

-- Five foreign wings in Maoist: Security Expert Tul Prasad Sherchan has claimed that the five chief leaders of the CPN-Maoist are under the control of five foreign spy agencies. He said that Prachanda is operating under the European Union and the Indian RAW controls

Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. He also said that Matrika Yadav is controlled by South Block in India, Russia controls Ram Bahadur Thapa alias Badal and Nanda Kishor Pun alias Pasang is handled by China. (Pro-palace "Rastravani," V/W, 3/17)

-- PM rules out foreign mediation: Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa Sunday iterated the government was ready to talk to Maoists but ruled out foreign mediation. Thapa categorically nixed the involvement of any foreign country or even the United Nations in solving Maoist insurgency, said activist Sudip Pathak of the Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON) who led a delegation of representatives of various civil society organizations to the Prime Minister. (The Himalayan Times, Nepal Samacharpatra, 3/16)

12. ELECTION TALK

-- Poll push a ploy, says Prachanda: "Prachanda has blamed the government for seeking American support for ensuring the political parties' participation in the elections to be announced soon. "U.S. representatives, from ministers to the ambassador, are knocking at the doors of leaders of political parties to make sure the parties participate in the so-called elections," Prachanda claimed". He also held the U.S. ambassador responsible for neglecting Nepal's sovereignty by visiting the Royal Nepalese Army barracks. "The U.S. ambassador is visiting the army barracks, thus humiliating Nepal's nationality and sovereignty," Prachanda said."(The Himalayan Times, 3/21)

-- Security authorities instructed for election preparation: The government, through letters, has instructed the security authorities in the districts to prepare for the general elections immediately after the Vijaya Dashami [Nepal's greatest festival in October]. (Centrist "Rajdhani," V/D, 3/20)

-- EC ready for polls: The Election Commission (EC) is ready to organize elections at any time. Chief Election Commissioner Keshav Raj Rajbhandari, taking to media persons here Thursday, said the EC office-bearers during their recent meeting with the prime minister found that the government was in the mentality of holding elections. (Major reports, 3/19)

13. GOVERNMENT

-- Selective ban on protests in Valley from Sunday: The District Administration, Kathmandu has clamped a ban, effective from March 21, on protest programs such as processions, sit-ins and fasts at public roads and areas, to maintain law and order. (Major newspapers, 3/20)

-- Foreign minister defends Nepal's human rights record: Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, Thursday defended Nepal's human rights records in the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. "If the situation in Nepal has been complex and challenging, it is not because of the lack of initiatives and commitments from the government, rather, it is largely because of the threats and violence created by Maoists." He also claimed that the government has taken resolute steps through targeted programs and institutional mechanism to protect and promote the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups. (The Kathmandu Post and others, 3/19)

14. REFUGEE PROBLEM

-- EU seeks Indian help in refugee issue: A top European Union (EU) official has urged India to lend a whelping hand to resolve the issue of Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin that has strained ties between the two nations. Paul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, emphasized the need for an early resolution of the issue and warned that, otherwise, the refugees could become a breeding ground for terrorists. (The Himalayan Times, 3/21)

-- European pressure on Bhutan: The European Commission has pressurized Bhutan to resolve the impasse of Bhutanese refugees at the soonest. A delegation of the European Commission during its visit to Bhutan has raised the issue. Although the delegation had gone there to take stock of their programs being run in Bhutan, they also raised the issue of refugees. More than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been languishing in seven camps in eastern Nepal for the last 13 years. (Leading dailies, 3/17)

16. NEPAL - U.S.

-- Rights protection rests more on government, U.S. envoy: The United States Ambassador to Nepal, Michael E. Malinowski, even while questioning the Maoists' credibility to call for international assessment on human rights, stressed that the government had bigger responsibility in protecting the human rights of the citizens. "The state cannot say since the Maoists are violating human rights, why can't we, since the government is not on the same plane as the Maoists," said the U.S. ambassador speaking to few journalists Thursday after releasing an anthology of papers on good governance in the capital. (The Kathmandu Post, 3/19)

-- Envoy to U.S. dies at 67: Royal Nepalese Ambassador to the United States, Jai Pratap Rana passed away in Washington Tuesday". U. S. Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski expressed his heartfelt condolences on the demise of Mr. Rana. "I personally, and on behalf of the U.S. mission in Nepal, mourn the loss of this valued friend and colleague and extend my sincere sympathy to his bereaved family and His Majesty's Government," a statement said. Seven while in Washington he maintained cordial relations with the U.S. Mission in Kathmandu, helping us better understand Nepal's foreign policy interests and their domestic context. (Major dailies, 3/18-19)

-- PM, U.S. official discuss bilateral ties: Deputy assistant secretary, Bureau of South Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Torkel L. Patterson, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa at the latter's office in Singha Durbar on Tuesday-. Patterson said that the democratic forces in Nepal should come together to help the government fight the Maoists. During his meeting with the PM, he advised that the king and democratic forces should align and compel the Maoists to come for talks and lay down arms. He also said that only talks could resolve the problem and every other problem in the country could be settled through democratic exercise. (Spactime, 3/17)

-- Powell's message to Dr. Thapa: The U.S. Foreign Secretary Colin Powell has sent a message to newly

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appointed Foreign Minister Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa wishing him a fruitful tenure in Nepal amid internal conflict and terrorism. Powell has said that the U.S. would extend cooperation in works in favor of human rights, democracy and rule of law. America is ready to provide assistance that would help control terrorism and resolve conflict. (Kantipur, 3/16)

17. OTHERS

-- Abortion rights comes into practice: The Indra Rajya Laxmi Maternity Hospital, Thapathali has started counseling services on safe abortion. Soon, the government will expand the service to other hospitals around the country. The service complies with the legal framework on abortion provisioned in the legislation endorsed by the parliament two years ago. (The Kathmandu Post, 3/20)

-- India for Janakpur-Jainagar railway service expansion: Indian Ambassador to Nepal Shyam Sharan Wednesday said that India is ready to help expand the one and only Janakpur-Jainagar railway services in Nepal. The 51 Kilometers long railway that links Bijalpur of Mahottari district and Jainagar of India has shortened its service to 27 kilometers from Janakpur to Jainagar two years ago. (The Kathmandu Post, 3/18)

-- Enact laws to check piracy: American professor James P Chandler said that Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is also a human right as any other right which needs to be protected by the state. According to him, intellectual property is the creation of an individual and it is the property of the creator, which is why the government should protect it by formulating necessary legislation. "Since the IPR is a creation of an individual, one cannot run his or her business without protecting it. He was speaking at a workshop on Intellectual Property Rights jointly organized by the American Center and Kathmandu School of Law (KSL) at Bhaktapur today. (The Himalayan Times, 3/17)

MALINOWSKI